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ABSTRACT

Even though an underlying assumption in most teacher evaluation models is that the evaluation process will lead to improvement of instruction, the evaluation process is seldom linked to a staff development program. A new staff development model is described which focuses on professional improvement for the teacher. In this model, each teacher becomes an active decision maker who works as a partner with the principal to annually develop a professional improvement plan. Individual plans may include attending local and state conferences and workshops, visiting model programs, taking classes, peer coaching, or other appropriate professional growth activities.The goal of the program is to improve instruction by developing teacher ownership and responsibility for professional growth and improvement. The principal and the teacher are active participants in the process. To facilitate the process, a list of model sites, conferences, workshops, courses, exemplary programs and teaching strategies is given as a resource guide to the teachers in the program. (JD)

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REDEFINING TEACHER EVALUATION AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT: AN OWNERSHIP MODEL FOR PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT

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Recently, a colleague of mine who has been teaching fifth grade for twenty-one years, was defending our school district's traditional teacher evaluation system. "The annual observation is important for me," she stated. "It's the one time each year that my principal lets me know that I'm still doing a good job." As I reflected on that statement, I could not help but wonder why a good teacher had to wait for a once-a-year teacher evaluation in order to receive a pat on the back. I was even more perplexed about the purpose of the annual evaluation--is it merely a reaffirmation that a veteran teacher is still doing a good job? Whatever happened to the concept of teacher evaluation for the purpose of improvement of instruction?

At times it seems that teacher evaluation has become an end in itself. Goal setting, a pre-observation conference, an in-class observation, a post-observation conference, and a written evaluation are common steps along the path to completing another annual evaluation cycle. Most school districts in this country use some type of teacher evaluation system. Countless hours and reams of paper are consumed along the way. And yet, have we been able to document that the process leads to improvement of instruction? According to recent polls, the American public does not seem convinced that instruction has improved in our public

schools. Principals often complain that teachers do not substantially change or improve, and teachers often complain that the evaluation process in meaningless. I remember a veteran math teacher sitting is the faculty lounge and poking fun at his most recent evaluation, "All of my evaluations sound the same," he scoffed. "I sometimes wonder if the principal just copies the verbiage from the year before."

Active Evaluation Versus Passive Evaluation

One administrator I know recently reflected on his role as a high school assistant principal who is striving to make teacher evaluation as meaningful as possible. He sets an appointment early each school year to have a conference with each teacher-- generally for one full period-- regarding goal setting for the coming year. Besides his duties which include student discipline for all juniors and seniors; student supervision during passing periods, at lunch, before and after school and in the evenings; student activities; the master schedule; and curriculum; he is responsible for evaluating at least twenty teachers each year. Prior to each observation, he has another conference with each teacher--generally for a full period-- regarding his upcoming observation and matters of importance to each teacher. He arrives for each observation before the tardy bell and remains in the class all period until all the students leave for their next class.

During each observation, he faithfully scripts the class, using a legal pad and carbon paper. At the end of the period, he leaves one copy of his notes for the teacher--generally five or

more pages of notes. Using his notes, he spends at least an hour completing an observation form with his written comments. He always has a conference with each teacher the day following an observation--generally for another full period--making reference to his notes and the typed observation form he has prepared. By the spring of each year, he completes that observation cycle two or more times with each teacher he evaluates. Then, as required by the master contract, he completes a multi-page narrative evaluation form pertaining to each teacher and has a conference again with each teacher regarding the final typed evaluation form.

He confides that it is always gratifying and a relief to deliver to central office the heavy box containing the typed and signed multi-page observations and evaluations for each of the twenty or more teachers he evaluates.

His experiences, I suspect, are not too different from the experiences of many conscientious building administrators. He strives to evaluate as he has been trained, and to do what is needed in order to complete the evaluation process properly. Yet, he shared with me, not one of his evaluations has ever been used to dismiss an incompetent teacher. And the distressing thought he said, "is that I am not certain that I could claim that any of my observations or evaluations have ever substantially improved instruction in the high school. In fact, I can think of many of the teachers I evaluate who continue to teach exactly as they were teaching when I began observing them five years ago."

It appears that the assistant principal is the person expending most of the energy in the evaluation process. He assumes the active role; the teacher's role is passive.

Evaluation Versus Staff Development

One of my friends, a business teacher, speaks fondly of an older colleague who taught business education for 34 years. During that time, the grand old gentleman developed quite a bit of notoriety as a real likable "character." The old man, who was seldom prepared for class, enjoyed sports in particular and life in general. Students knew that one well-placed question could get him telling stories for an entire class period. Each year, when the principal would drop in unannounced to observe the class, the old man would fumble around, have the students open their books to a hastily chosen exercise, and he would begin asking the confused students to respond to the questions in the book. Each year, the principal would use the evaluation instrument to document his concerns regarding lesson planning and time on task. The old gentleman would good-naturedly accept the comments and then promply return to his story-telling habits. Two years ago, the old gentleman became ill and died. His former students and colleagues missed him a great deal. Yet, not one person eulogized him as a good teacher. Twenty or more years of evaluations had documented concerns, but the old man's instructional strategies had not improved.

Even though an underlying assumption in most teacher evaluation models is that the evaluation process will lead to improvement of instruction, the evaluation process seldom seems

to be linked to a staff development program. Staff development is not usually designed to meet those individual needs of teachers that are identified during the evaluation process. Yet, as Sergiovanni and Starratt point out, staff development should be aimed at keeping a staff growing in competence and excitement about their work. It would seem logical for staff development to be linked to the evaluation process in order to provide specific opportunities for improvement.

Staff development in education generally functions separately from teacher evaluation. Too often, administrators plan one or two inservice activities annually, and it is perceived as the teachers' duty to attend. In many cases, those one or two inservice activities must suffice each year as the only staff development opportunities for most teachers.

In an attempt to meet individual needs, the administration sometimes appoints planning committees in an attempt to involve teachers in identifying staff development needs. Sometimes inservice days will include concurrent sessions aimed at giving teachers more choices. However, teachers generally are passive recipients of the inservice program, and individual needs are not always met. Imagine being the enthused and energetic first-year kindergarten teacher in the district that scheduled one inservice day last year and offered teachers three choices for their inservice day: (1) stress management, (2) coping with burnout, and (3) AIDS in the curriculum.

An Ownership Model for Professional Improvement

A middle school health teacher was recently sitting in on a post-observation conference with her building principal. The principal had observed students disrupting the class and had written some comments regarding classroom management techniques. The teacher, genuinely concerned and frustrated, told her supervisor, "I have been trying the same thing for twenty years, and it's just not working."

Where does that health teacher turn for new ideas and growth opportunities which may improve her competence and renew her excitement about teaching? A great deal of evidence suggests that the teacher evaluation and staff development models we have been using in education for twenty years have not been working. A new model is needed in order to focus on professional improvement-- improvement being the common purpose of most teacher evaluation and staff development programs.

In Hobart, Indiana teachers and their union have worked collaboratively with administrators to develop and collectively bargain a model which redefines teacher evaluation and staff development as intertwined in a process focusing on professional improvement. Each teacher becomes an active decision maker who works as a partner with his or her principal to annually develop a professional improvement plan. Based on his or her plan, each teacher identifies staff development opportunities for professional growth. An Indiana Department of Education Teacher Quality Grant is being used to fund the professional growth program. Individual plans may include attending local and state conferences and workshops, visiting other classrooms or schools, attending seminars, visiting model programs, taking classes, peer

coaching, or other appropriate professional growth activities.

The Changing Roles of Teachers and Principals

The roles of teachers and principals are changing. Since each plan is individualized, and each teacher has ownership in his or her plan, the primary responsibility for professional improvement rests with each teacher. The principal, who is the primary supervisor, functions as a coach, enabler, resource person, barrier breaker, and facilitator.

Each teacher and his or her principal must mutually agree for the teacher to enter the professional growth program in place of the traditional formative/summative evaluation program. Once a teacher is in the professional growth program, the teacher remains in the program on a continuing basis, unless the principal determines a need to remove the teacher from the program.

If the principal determines that a teacher should be removed from the program, notification must be given in writing and then for one full school year the teacher is placed in a prescriptive professional growth plan. If a teacher is in a prescriptive program, the principal designs the staff development plan based on perceived needs. The emphasis, however, remains on professional improvement. If, at the end of that year, the principal is still not satisfied with a teacher's professional growth, that teacher is notified in writing and placed in a traditional summative evaluation program.

The vast majority of teachers, however, participate in the

professional growth program, take an active responsibility for their own professional improvement, and work closely with the principal to meet their individual needs.

Selection of Teachers for the Professional Growth Program

As a guideline for placing teachers in the professional growth program, principals have agreed that the teachers generally fall into one of four categories, empirically defined as follows:

30% - the best teachers in the building who will unquestionably profit from the professional growth program, teachers who have received glowing evaluations year after year.

55% - the majority of competent teachers who are not the best teachers in the school, but those who will continue to work for the school district and who should profit a great deal from a bona fide professional growth program.

10% - weak teachers who will have to address specific weaknesses using a traditional prescriptive teacher evaluation program before being considered further for the self-directed professional growth program.

5% - the incompetent teachers who will be placed in a summative evaluation program which will lead to significant changes or dismissal.

The goal of the professional growth program is to improve instruction by developing teacher ownership and responsibility for professional growth and improvement. The principal and the teacher are active participants in the process. When discussing the professional growth program and trying to determine which teachers would benefit from such a process, one principal posed a compelling question: "If a teacher is on the staff, and the

administration has no intention of seeking dismissal, wouldn't it make sense to place the teacher in the professional growth program where the teacher has a responsibility to improve?"

Board Policy and Professional Growth

In order for teachers and principals to be equipped with guideposts for professional improvement, the professional growth program must be consistent with the mission statement developed by the Board of School Trustees. The mission statement in Hobart is as follows:

1.200

MISSION STATEMENT: The primary mission of the Board of School Trustees, School City of Hobart, is to continually provide effective community schools.

1.201

Effective Community Schools adequately equip young people for adulthood in the 21st century. Our students must be prepared both for employment and for day-to-day living in a complicated and rapidly changing world. This necessitates that our schools provide students with the intellectual tools necessary for life-long learning. Among these tools must be: skills to facilitate participation in a democracy, communication skills, technical literacy, problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, and other flexible learning skills as well as the ability to work both individually and in a team situation. It is expected that these skills be developed through all curricular areas.

1.202

Effective Community Schools address the needs of individual students and focus on individual development. Students bring to the schools a great diversity of interests, aptitudes, motivations and learning styles. Our schools must be able to address this diversity by identifying individual needs, responding with appropriate teaching strategies, flexibly meeting these needs and recognizing each individual student's ability to contribute to the school community.

1.203

An Effective Community School System has a close, working relationship with the local community. This must include the

entire range of the community including business and industry, government, other institutions, civic groups and individual citizens. The relationship is cooperative with both schools and community benefiting from sharing of strengths.

1.204

Effective Community Schools fully utilize the resources of the entire school community (administration, teachers, support personnel, students, families) in all aspects of school life. Effective Community Schools cannot exist without the committed involvement of all.

In choosing areas for professional growth, teachers must demonstrate how the areas they choose to pursue are in accordance with the mission statement of the Board. If a teacher chooses a professional growth area which is not clearly part of the district's mission statement, the individual teacher may seek the approval of the superintendent by submitting a written rationale. The important issue is that professional growth and improvement will be guided by the mission statement of the local district.

Creating a Pool of Exciting Professional Growth Experiences

Having the mission statement to provide guideposts, outstanding teachers representing a variety of grade levels and subject areas meet in the fall with educational experts from the Indiana Department of Education, Phi Delta Kappa and universities to brainstorm regarding professional growth activities which may be worthwhile for teachers in the district. A list of model sites, conferences, workshops, courses, exemplary programs and teaching strategies is generated as a resource guide for teachers in the district. While the list is not definitive, it is designed to provide teachers with viable and interesting options as they design their individual professional growth plans.

Teacher Ownership and Outcomes

By combining teacher evaluation and staff development into an individualized ownership process, the district has made teachers and principals partners in instructional improvement. The teacher is an active participant, exercising self-direction in professional growth. This is not unlike other professions. Two friends of mine, a clinical pharmacist and an attorney, select and participate in their own professional growth experiences. Each of them is primarily evaluated on outcome--that is, how well each of them continues to practice his and her profession.

The Hobart teachers' professional growth program is similar to those found in other professions. Each teacher in the professional growth program, like the clinical pharmacist and the attorney, accepts responsibility for seeking meaningful growth opportunities. And, like the clinical pharmacist and the attorney, the teacher is be evaluated on the outcome: continuance in the professional growth program is dependent upon each teacher's instructional improvement.

Each teacher who participates in an approved professional growth activity is asked to submit a brief one-page summary to his or her principal. The summary asks the teacher to address three areas:

1. Evaluate your experience.
2. Detail how the experience may be applied to your teaching.

3. If possible, describe how this professional growth experience has benefited one child.

The summary, as does every component in this professional growth program, focuses on instructional improvement.

In The Final Analysis . . .

Like so many young teachers, I began teaching after completing a college degree which included some methods courses and nine weeks of student teaching.

During my first year of teaching, the principal evaluated me twice and the department head evaluated me once. I remember taking my written evaluations home for my wife and even my parents to read. Never once, however, can I remember an evaluation serving as a significant learning experience that changed my teaching skills. I grew from experience, not from the teacher evaluation process.

During my first four years of teaching, I never had an opportunity to be away from my classroom to pursue a professional growth experience except during the once-a-year district-wide inservice day when all teachers in our K-12 district gathered in the high school auditorium to receive our annual inservice. I can vaguely remember topics such as student discipline, school law, writing across the curriculum, and a motivational speaker. I can clearly remember veteran teachers complaining loudly about the waste of time. What I can't remember is having a significant learning experience that improved my teaching.

In the spring of my fourth year of teaching, the principal asked me to head a committee to develop a gifted education

program for the high school. I knew nothing about gifted education, but I began to immerse myself in the literature. Then, in May, the principal asked me to attend a three-day workshop conducted by Joseph Renzulli. I had taught for four years and never before attended an educational workshop.

For three days, I attended the workshop, took notes, gathered materials, participated in small group activities, spoke with other educators during the breaks and at lunch, and jotted down dozens of ideas that I wanted to carry back to my classroom. The experience was exhilirating--partially due to the talent of Dr. Renzulli, and partially due to the challenging atmosphere which gave me an opportunity to interact with educators from other schools. But most importantly, my teaching was truly affected by that experience. I never taught a unit again which did not move students to higher order thinking. I had had a significant learning experience, and I knew it.

Since that time, I have attended countless professional workshops, lectures, conferences and conventions. Some have been worthwhile, some have been a bust, and some have made lasting changes in me professionally. But most significantly, I have always welcomed opportunities for professional growth, never forgetting that first workshop and the power of professional improvement.

As the School City of Hobart moves away from a traditional evaluation model and toward a professional growth model, combining teacher evaluation and staff development into a self-directed and active professional growth program, our teachers are able to choose professional growth opportunities. Some of our

teachers will participate in professional growth experiences which will prove to be significant learning experiences for them, experiences which will lead to improvement of instruction. When that happens, the children in our classrooms will benefit.